

Central and South Asia
Regional Conference on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)
(Summary report)

On June 29-30, Astana hosted the Conference of Ministers and high representatives of 9 countries of Central and South Asia to discuss countering violent extremism in the region. Participants of the conference included official delegates of 9 partner states and 11 partner organizations, as well as civil society organizations and the private sector.

The Conference was held at the initiative of Kazakhstan, following the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in Washington DC on February 19, 2015. The objectives of the conference included discussing views and experiences of consolidated efforts on countering violent extremism, as well as developing coordinated efforts by governments and multilateral institutions in the region on this issue.

The discussions were designed to facilitate the development of new strategies and specific programs and initiatives, which will be submitted at the CVE leaders' summit on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2015.

The participants spoke about the efforts made in the region to implement the goals set out in the Joint Plan of Action 2011, as part of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia.

It was declared at the Conference that the tasks of the Joint Plan would be gradually implemented by the participants.

The practical contributions of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), the Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), OSCE, CIS, SAARC and SCO were noted during the discussions.

The participants also discussed the results of regional dialogues between the leaders of religious institutions and security officials that took place in Almaty in 2013 ("Cooperation towards countering extremism and preventing conflicts"), in Bishkek in 2014 ("Engaging the media in countering terrorism in the region") and in Dushanbe in 2015 ("Responding to the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters").

Noting the contribution of the above meetings, the participants stressed the importance of multilateral efforts. In particular, they confirmed the importance of Pillars 1 and 4 of the Joint Plan of Action 2011, which highlight measures to address the conditions that lead to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism and the need to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law as the basis for preventing this. At the same time the focus was on the need to strengthen national development strategies through the following initiatives:

- Support for women and young people;
- Sharing information and research findings on what causes radicalization (social exclusion or political marginalization);
- Raising awareness of human rights, freedom of religion, conflict resolving and inter-ethnic dialogue;
- Further development of counter-messages and positive narratives in response to violent extremist propaganda.

In addition, the Conference noted the contribution of the 5th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in June in Astana with the participation of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in strengthening inter-religious and intercultural dialogue. The Conference participants welcomed the outcome of the Congress and noted the importance of cooperation between religious leaders to counter violent extremism.

The participants concluded:

- Adherence to countering violent extremism, that leads to terrorism, on the principals of equal and impartial assessment of these threats;
- Importance of the UN in addressing violent extremism and the significance of the comprehensive framework that the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia offers for dealing with the spread of terrorism;
- Appreciation for the commitment to implement the obligations set out in the UN Security Council Resolution 2178, welcoming its focus on the critical role of local NGOs and communities in countering violent extremism;
- Call on the UN, CTC/CTED, OSCE, CIS, SCO and other international and regional organizations to continue to play an active role in promoting cooperation and government efforts to counter violent extremism, which causes terrorism, as well as developing a common internationally lawful definition of these threats;
- Existence of threats posed to all countries by terrorism and violent extremism, including returning foreign fighters;
- The need for a comprehensive strategy that identifies and develops a wide range of tools to counter the spread of violent extremism, including common and agreed list of extremist and terrorist organizations and their sponsors;
- Progress made in strengthening legal, institutional, and operational frameworks and capacities to address terrorism. Challenges associated with addressing foreign fighters, while protecting civil rights and freedoms;
- The need for localized, specialized, and expanded efforts to counter and prevent the spread of violent extremism. These efforts include capacity building of local actors, such as municipal governments and communities, religious, cultural and education leaders, making sure to take into account local customs and traditional values;
- Importance of developing comprehensive national strategies and action plans for addressing violent extremism, making sure to include a variety of national government agencies, as well as representatives of the civil society in designing these strategies;
- The need to work together to better understand the precise nature of violent extremist threats at the local and regional level, including by promoting research, analysis, and information sharing on the causes of all types of violent extremism;
- The need to take into account human rights when developing the strategy for countering violent extremism;
- Importance of strengthening relations between law enforcement agencies and local communities to avoid creating an environment that leads to the growth of violent extremism;
- The commitment to develop national programs based on the UN, the Global Forum for the Fight against Terrorism/Global Counterterrorism Forum, as well as other international best practices;
- The need to respond to the threat of extremism through the use of social networks;
- Importance of strengthening the “immunity” of the local population against the ideas of violent extremism, expanding the range of social services and economic programs to provide young people with new opportunities, enhance civic education and the culture of peace, tolerance and non-violence;

The participants, stressing the peaceful philosophy of world religions, proposed concrete steps to enhance national and regional CVE efforts in South and Central Asia in advance of the CVE leaders’ summit in September. These steps include:

- To identify relevant persons responsible for countering extremism in each country in the region;
- To develop inclusive national CVE strategies that involve local governments, civil society, and the private sector, based on the experience and knowledge of the Global Forum for the Fight against Terrorism/Global Counterterrorism Forum;
- To implement Global Counterterrorism Forum good practices regarding CVE through capacity-building initiatives and awareness-raising activities;
- To provide support for national NGOs involved in countering local factors causing extremism, radicalization and recruitment of citizens;
- To develop and implement training programs for public servants working on CVE that emphasize the promotion of rights;
- To expand and/or develop programs for countering radicalization in prisons and programs promoting rehabilitation and reintegration into society of violent extremist offenders, drawing on best practices and expertise of the UN, OSCE and Global Forum for the Fight against Terrorism/Global Counterterrorism Forum and other regional organizations;
- To strengthen and support the capacity of civil society organizations and other NGOs in the region engaged in providing the population with information that counters the hateful and violence-filled messages of the extremists and terrorists.

The participants expressed their gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for their hospitality and for organizing the productive meeting, which will lead to the promotion of joint measures of regional countries in countering violent extremism, as well as the reduction of risks and threats in the region. The participants also thanked the organizers for inviting partner states, international, non-governmental and other civil society organizations, which facilitates effective regional and global cooperation.

List of Central and South Asia Countries

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Uzbekistan
Afghanistan
Bangladesh
India
Pakistan
Sri Lanka

List of invited partner states and organizations

United States of America
Russian Federation
China
Turkey
Iran
France
Germany
the Netherlands
Italy
UN RCCA
UN CTED
World Bank
International Organization for Migration
EU
OSCE
Commonwealth of Independent States
Collective Security Treaty Organization
Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SCO Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure
Organization of Islamic Cooperation
Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia